Programme in Linguistics and English teaching

Paper 5

Linguistics and the teaching of literature

P S Doughty

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Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching

Paper No. 5

LINGUISTICS AND THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE

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Preliminaries:
The English Teacher's Experience of Literary Studies

'English has come to embrace so wide a range of activities, and those who teach it hold such diverse views about what they should be doing, that virtually any general statement about 'English' or those who teach it can seem false to the individual teacher for whom it is not personally true. The one matter upon which a large measure of agreement might be found however is the importance of literature in an English teacher's work. For this reason, the list of papers prepared by the Nuffield Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching might well surprise many experienced teachers, because it contains only one paper devoted to literature. Their surprise reflects a strong underlying conviction that the teaching of literature remains the final justification for having 'English' in the timetable at all. At a more personal level perhaps one could say that for many teachers it is the one area of their work which makes much of the routine bearable. If this seems too extreme a way of putting the matter, then at least we can say that literature constitutes an unavoidable commitment for the majority. A teacher may be anxious to provide his pupils with a standard of 'good English'; he may want to ensure that they can meet the demands of an examination in English language, however much he may resent its presence; he may wish to create the conditions in his classroom for vigorously expressive use of language, written or spoken; but whatever he chooses to put into his programme, it is most unlikely that literature will not play some part in it. This fact must have a profound effect upon any discussion of 'English'. It is not possible to pretend that literature is not there, or that it can be left out of account while attention is focused upon other aspects of work in English.

This may seem a curious way to begin, for this fact is so well recognised that it would scarcely seem to need mention: it is something that we all take for granted as teachers of English. It is just this commonplaceness however that creates real difficulties for a research and development programme in linguistics and English teaching.

Current assumptions about the place and importance and function of literature in English work are a major factor in determining the attitude of English teachers to all other aspects of their work. They create a climate of opinion that is wary of anything seemingly hostile to the central place of literature in the class. Initially, let us look at two facets of this prevailing climate of opinion, both directly affecting the work of the Programme: the first is the effect of a certain kind of failure in the teaching of literature upon many young teachers' attitudes to 'English': the second is the effect of literary studies upon the English teacher's way of thinking about the subject matter of 'English'.(1)

Very large claims have been made for the part literature can play in developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of their world, particularly by those responsible for the training of teachers. This is a major subject for discussion in itself, and is touched upon obliquely in the first two sections of the Introduct-

(1) Paper No. 1 "The Relevance of Linguistics for the teacher of English"; P.S. Doughty.

ory paper to this series, but one consequence of this emphasis has a direct effect upon the work of the Programme. Many young teachers now enter the classroom expecting too much of literature. They come to believe that it is capable of generating a string of exciting lessons for them through its mere impact; and that their task is simply to put it before their pupils, and wait for something to happen. An experienced teacher knows that such a method may produce extraordinary results on rare occasions with exceptional pupils: all they will want from him are library services, and an absence of interference. He also knows that a particular class may occasionally react in a most rewarding and unpredictable way to a piece of literature that is merely placed in front of them. He knows however that no teacher can rely upon this happening. The conditions that make it possible at all have to be painstakingly created by the teacher himself; they don't derive spontaneously from the novels and poems. Moreover, he is never surprised if the whole operation falls flat on its face, leaving teacher and pupils wondering what all the effort was about. Most important of all, he would never expect to build his whole programme of work on the assumption that response to literature would provide a structure for it day after day.

However when the teacher new to the classroom discovers that the looked-for excitement does not materialise as often or as immediately as he had come to believe it would, a reaction sets in, and the very possibility of handling literature with the pupils in question comes to be rejected. This is often voiced in terms that are depressingly familiar -- 'you can't do poetry with teenagers'; 'you can't get them to read a decent novel'; 'they're just not up to it, you know', 'it' being anything which has fallen flat, and which the speaker has been taught to regard as vital for the survival of our literary culture. One important result of this kind of reaction however is a plea for a proper 'subject matter', a subject matter that can be taught term-in and term-out just like the 'subject matter' of all the other parts of the curriculum. When a unit such as the Nuffield Programme comes to the notice of a teacher suffering from this reaction, perhaps naturally he assumes that it exists to solve his problem for him by providing just that day-to-day teachable material for lessons he is in search of.

If he has in mind something like a language equivalent of the standard secondary school text-book, he is bound to be disappointed, because the work of the Programme does not intend to follow the recent developments in the United States, and try to derive a new 'subject matter' from the linguistic study of language. The Programme would rather stress the distance between the subject matter of linguistics and the classroom needs of the pupil: and emphasise the crucial role of the teacher in mediating between them. This paper seeks to show what this would mean in relation to the teaching of literature: and thereby show what the teacher's own acquaintance with linguistic studies could contribute to a solution of his classroom problems. In particular, this discussion of the teaching of literature suggests that an enhanced control over his present subject matter is a more profitable goal for his use of linguistic studies than the setting up of a new 'subject matter'.

The situation discussed in the preceding paragraphs is a particular case of the more general proposition that the English teacher's experience of literary studies profoundly affects his attitude to his task in the classroom. Again, stated baldly in this way, it is a truism: yet its implications are frequently overlooked, especially when the subject of discussion is the role of the English class in the curriculum as a whole; and that, after all, is a matter no programme in linguistic studies and English teaching can reasonably ignore. In the majority of cases an English teacher's major intellectual effort as a student will have been focused on the literary critical study of literature; this is as true of the College of Education student as it is of the University student. Indeed, the emphasis that has emerged in some discussions of the new B.Ed. suggests that many are only too willing to make their main course English work approximate as closely as possible to the literary critical model offered by University Departments of English. There is an important reservation to be made however: many teachers who are now called upon 'to do a bit of English' do not have this background, for they are not English specialists, but geographers, historians, physical education specialists; anyone, that is, who has a gap at the right place in his timetable. If they ask their colleagues in the English department for some guidance, they expect to be shown the 'subject matter'(2) they are to teach: and literature is likely to appear the only concrete 'subject matter' they are offered.

This is not really surprising, because most people in secondary schools simply assume that a teacher's qualification to teach derives from his knowledge of a subject matter: the purpose of one's teaching is to expound the subject matter: therefore all 'subjects' must have a subject matter. In an unfamiliar field, the obvious way to discover what one should be doing is to look for the subject matter. Physics is taught by people who have specialised in physics: French is taught by people who have specialised in French: consequently 'English' is taught by people who have specialised in -- literature.

It was said right at the beginning of this paper that any generalisation about teachers of English was likely to be open to objection, because the range of the subject is so wide, and the experience of those teaching it so diverse: the part played by literary studies in that experience however is an allowable exception. Certainly, it is so important a factor in determining attitudes to 'English' that no research programme could ignore it. From it comes the assumption that literature is necessarily the focal point of work in English: and from it come also many of the preconceptions about language that influence the choice of activities for the classroom. The unconscious precedence so often given to written over spoken English -- the assumption that written English, and perhaps one special kind of written English, establishes the norm for English of all kinds -- is a case in point. Another is provided by the assumption that ways of writing English form something like an ascending order of merit with the language of commerce and scientific papers somewhere near the bottom end, the language of the 19th century novelists well up towards the other end, and the language of poets at the top. It is true that it is easy to reject such a statement in the detached moment of reading: and yet where two or three teachers are gathered together to discuss their problems, the active presence of such a hierarchy of values rapidly asserts itself, for many teachers seem reluctant to believe that different ways of writing ought to be considered separate hierarchies of this kind, each with its own particular qualities, and each capable of producing unsuccessful examples.(3)

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(2) Paper No. 2, "The Subject Matter of English" by Ruquaiya Hasan and Stephen Lushington.

It may seem odd that so far the word 'style' has not been used where most readers would be likely to use it themselves. The terms 'way of writing' or 'way of speaking' occur instead. As these will appear quite frequently in what follows, it would be useful to say a word about them, before going further. There is one very obvious reason for avoiding the use of 'style', and one less obvious. Unfortunately, like many other terms in literary discussion such as 'image' or 'metaphor' or 'rhythm', 'style' has been emptied of meaning, because it has had too diverse a range of meanings attached to it. Any reader can verify this for himself, for he is likely to

(3) Paper No. 4 "Current Attitudes to Written English, and their implications for the teacher of English" by P.S. Doughty provides a more detailed exploration of this area.

put his own interpretation upon it wherever he meets it. He will have certain expectations about the sense of the word and unless he is prevented by careful and explicit definition, he is likely to respond to the word in a way that will match his expectations. Even if a writer has gone out of his way to ensure a specific meaning for it however, his efforts are likely to be frustrated by the remarkable tenacity of an individual reader's preconceptions, especially when the word in question has been part of that reader's professional usage over many years. Again, a word like 'style', or 'grammar', or 'analysis', often provokes a rational understanding from the reader while he is reading which is counteracted by his unconscious translation of the new sense back into the sense familiar to him. At the end of the book or paper, what the writer has been trying to say about 'style' is recalled only through the reader's unmodified preconceptions of what he 'ought to have meant' by the word. It is for reasons such as these, and not from any desire to mystify, that words like 'style' are often deliberately avoided in these papers.

The matter of old terms and new terms and precise terms is a general one which recurs through all of these papers. The essential task of the Programme is to make known to an audience largely unaware of them the activities of an advanced academic discipline that is particularly relevant to work in English. This is a situation in which attitudes to terms, and reactions to their use, can be critically important. The problem is at its most acute whenever the subject is the study of literature, for every reader will have firm notions about the appropriate way of referring to the topics that arise.

In the instance we are now concerned with, however, there is a more particular reason for wanting a term that does not have familiar connotations. The number of different senses of the word 'style' to be found in current discussion of literature presents one problem but there is a more important objection to its use - the implication that it points necessarily to features in a writer's use of language which are primarily aesthetic in impact, and to these alone. Whatever we may mean by style, we are unlikely to believe that it refers to all those factors which actually determine an individual's writing or speaking in a particular way on a particular occasion. In particular, the broad cultural factors that influence his choice of language are apt to be left out of account: all those expectations writing and speaking will arouse, because it happens when and where it does, that make up publicly received notions of what is appropriate. An illustration is provided by the absence of the first person in this paper: another by the way in which general statements have been qualified. The paragraph before last began, 'It may seem odd that....' It could have begun in a number of ways -- 'It may have struck the reader as odd that...'; 'It should be said that...'; 'I haven't used the word "style" so far'. The choice between them was not merely arbitrary. Expectations about the appropriate form of words for that opening at that point had been set up by the 'way of writing' adopted for the paper: and the choice of that 'way of writing' was itself determined by more general expectations about the 'way of writing' suitable for the published work of a research and development programme.

Let us now turn to another aspect of our common experience of literary studies; it is a particular application of the truism that our notions about the relative value of different kinds of intellectual activity derive in great measure from our own learning experiences as pupils, as students, and subsequently as teachers. Put another way, this is to suggest that the mental habits we develop as students within a specific subject area come to have a far-reaching effect upon our attitudes to intellectual activity. Moreover, though this effect may show most powerfully in our reaction to any treatment of that familiar subject matter -- the study of literature, for instance -- it comes to be a major determining element in our total way of looking at learning processes and thinking processes. These mental habits come to underlie our response to any discussion of classroom problems.(4) They become so much a part of our normal way of thinking about teaching English that we are no longer aware of their presence. What started out as a particular set of assumptions on someone's part about how to teach literature to college students ends up by being an integral part of an English teacher's 'normal' way of life in the classroom.

(4) This aspect of a teacher's approach to his tasks is explored in Paper No. 1: "The relevance of linguistics for the teacher of English", section IV.

It is difficult to exemplify this aspect of the situation at all adequately, and still be brief enough for an introductory paper. Let us say for the moment that the experience of studying literature seems to confer upon English teachers a strong bias against any intellectual activity that exhibits systematic and highly structured procedures. One facet of this bias shows itself in a distrust of precise distinctions and carefully developed terms; often accompanied by an equal distrust of statements involving a high measure of generality. This bias is particularly important when the question at issue is the teacher's approach to the classroom. It is not only the attitude to language an English teacher derives from preponderantly literary studies that a Programme such as this must take note of. It must be equally conscious of his attitudes to the study of both language and literature that derive from the same source: and aware of his likely views about the study of language when the language for study happens to be in the shape of a piece of literature. There is no point at which there is more scope for misunderstanding the aims and purposes of the Nuffield Programme.

II

Attitudes to Linguistics in the Study of Literature

The opening section of this paper has tried to provide a context for the discussion that follows. There is a real danger that many teachers will misinterpret the intentions of the Programme, because they read into its very existence a threat to the place of literature in the classroom as they understand it. This fear is compounded of two elements that need to be distinguished. The larger matter involves the whole balance of power, as it were, within subject English. It was phrased quite bluntly by a questioner at a recent conference involving the Programme -- 'Is it not true that you people want to put linguistics into the classroom; and use it to drive out literature?' The Introductory Paper makes quite clear that our answer to this question is 'no': the Programme is not designed to 'put linguistics into the classroom'. It is true however that a reappraisal of work in English from a linguistic point of view is likely to lead to a shift of emphasis: any such shift of emphasis away from a literature-centred English teaching however very much parallels a similar shift apparent in much recent discussion, notably Frank Whitehead's The Disappearing Dais, F.D. Flower's Language and Education, and John Dixon's Growth Through English.(5)

The second source of trouble involves attitudes to the study of literature, rather than its place in the classroom. It is a regrettable fact that many believe linguistic studies can make no positive contribution to the study of literature and that their effect will be merely destructive: that linguistic analysis is necessarily desiccating, a violence done to the very nature of a novel or poem as a finished imaginative work. This generalisation over-simplifies the situation, but in essence it does represent accurately many current reactions to the notion that the linguistic study of its language can contribute to the proper understanding of a work of literature. It must be confessed that some of

(5) Frank Whitehead: The Disappearing Dais, Chatto and Windus, 1966.
F.D. Flower: Language and Education, Longmans, 1966.
John Dixon: Growth Through English, NATE publication, 1967.

the things done to literature in the name of linguistics would seem to justify this assessment. There have been too many examples of the linguistic analysis of a poem which do no more than list its grammatical parts, as though a poem were simply constructed by putting the parts together, much as one would make up a model out of Meccano: the list of the parts is then offered as a full description of the poem. Two things can be said here however. The belief that 'naming of parts' in itself constitutes a valid account of a piece of literature is a vicious habit that is by no means confined to linguists. Listing all the references to Horace in Pope; or tabulating Hardy's references to identifiable places; or contributing one more mite to the massive output of the Shakespeare industry by counting end-stopped lines in the early comedies, are examples of an ancient and familiar misdirection of energy in literary studies. Equally familiar to many is the assumption that a poem like 'Pearl' or 'Sir Gawain' is satisfactorily dealt with by giving detailed philological descriptions of its vocabulary. Both linguist and literary critic here make the same mistake. They assume that listing the facts is of itself a meaningful comment on the work in question.

To reject this as inadequate is not the same thing however as saying that there is no point in assembling the data at all. The justification for producing the facts is the use made of them in the full elucidation of the work in question. An account of pronouns used in a novel that simply lists and classifies the uses the novelist has made of pronouns is a job half done. A writer who uses his analysis of pronouns, however, and other specific linguistic features like choice of tense, or type of subordinate clause, to show how a novelist controls his reader's attitude to his characters in a specific scene, is demonstrating the value of having (as a basis for critical comment on a work) a revealing analysis of its language.(6) It is making a reality of the 'close reading' that has become the dominant mode in both the study and the teaching of literature at almost every level. Mention has been made of the degree to which a teacher's own

(6) It is interesting to see that some literary critics have been moving in the same direction. It was apparent twelve years ago in Donald Davie's brilliant Articulate Energy Routledge Kegan Paul (1955); and it can be seen at work in Winifred Nowottny's more recent The Language Poets Use University of London (1962).

experience in learning moderates his chosen ways of teaching. For many, 'close reading' has grown to be synonymous with teaching literature: and literature has become identified with those works that lend themselves to 'close reading': hence literature is only to be used when pupils can measure up to the demands of 'close reading'. Moreover teachers seldom look carefully at those demands in terms of a pupil's linguistic capacity to meet them: they are often much more severe than even a good teacher may realise.

There is a very real danger in this sort of situation that he may force his pupils to treat 'close reading' as though it were a complicated puzzle: they learn to apply a rigid technique to the flexible situation that he prepares for them, because the kind of participation that he hopes for makes too great a demand upon their experience of language. The teacher believes that he is creating a flexible and responsive relationship between pupil and text which will 'educate his sensibility' through a genuinely unconstrained exploration of the work in question: the teacher's task is to mediate between pupil and text, and the pupil must be able to get the measure of both the content and the language of the text for himself.

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If we want our pupils to make their contribution to 'close reading' independently of the teacher's promptings, we recognise that we have to choose a text whose subject matter does not exceed by too wide a margin the pupil's own experience of the world: we want to stretch them by presenting vicariously experience which is unfamiliar, but we perceive the effects of exceeding a limit of difference which they can tolerate. Their verbal contribution to the activity of 'close reading' vanishes, and all we are likely to get in any writing that we ask for is a rehash of what we have said.

When we turn to the impediments that language may offer, we find the situation is rather different. Comment about the difficulty or unsuitability of certain writers from the point of view of their language tends to mean two things: either it refers to the problems of understanding what they wrote; or it points to their use of a 'high style', or 'literary' language.(7) Teachers seldom

(7) The author has heard the following names expressly mentioned in this context on several occasions: Chaucer, 16th century lyric, Spenser, Restoration Comedy, 18th century pastoral lyric, Jane Austen, Byron, Henry James, and T.S. Eliot.

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consider that there may be a limit to what they can reasonably hope to achieve through 'close reading' set by their pupils' experience of language comparable to the limit set by their experience of the world. It is at the point where we pass this limit that the pupil loses his power to contribute individually to the unconstrained exploration of exciting literature: he has to turn to the adult in the situation, and model his contribution on the language that the teacher himself uses. Obviously, the critical factor here is the width of the gap between the pupil's experience of language, and the demands a writer makes upon it, both through the language of the text, and through the way of speaking about the text that its character requires. The more weight that we place upon technique of close reading, the more necessary it is that we should be able to focus specifically upon the linguistic difficulties which may result.

There is a second kind of reaction to the linguistic study of literature: some objections are really objections to the very notion of detailed classroom discussion of literature, unless it is informal and intuitive; a discussion which is a feature of the ongoing work of the group, but not in any sense a recognisable exploration of a novel or play for its own sake. This attitude is bound up with a whole set of assumptions about 'English'; and though it is held fully by comparatively few practising teachers, it seems to be very influential in the training of teachers, and must therefore receive some consideration.(8) Certainly it has contributed more than its fair share to the undercurrent of hostility against linguistic studies that seems to affect much published discussion of their relevance for English teaching. Perhaps this is the point to put on record that, just as the Programme does not intend to set up linguistic studies as a classroom subject matter, so it would not argue that a teacher would want to carry on a linguistic study of literature in the classroom.

The programme has come to accept that there is a widespread uneasiness about the effects of linguistic study upon teaching literature. In this context, the fact that this is the only paper devoted solely to linguistics and literature is not at all a reflection of the importance the Programme attaches to the part literature should play in English work. The reasons are quite pragmatic; the brief given to the Programme was to explore the possible contribution linguistics could make to English teaching. The team were left to choose for themselves the activities within 'English' that the Programme should be concerned with. In the event, all that English teachers actually did, or aspired to do, in their classrooms seemed equally relevant to an understanding of the contribution linguistics might make, because everything done in English work involved a particular use of language and would affect those things which were 'language work' in a narrow curriculum sense. Initially, there were four teachers of English in the Programme. Given that the one constant feature of an enormously heterogeneous practice is the emphasis currently placed upon the part literature should play in English work, it is understandable that the impact of linguistic studies upon these four should have produced a marked shift of interest towards 'language' matters. It seemed important to concentrate at first upon all those aspects of work in English that linguistic studies brought into prominence, and consequently the teacher's use of literature gained comparatively little direct attention. In the new perspective provided by linguistics, literature lost its dominant position, and appeared as only one amongst the many varieties of written English, that would benefit by being examined from a linguistic point of view.

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(8) Something more is said of this matter in sections I and II of Paper No. 1, already referred to.

To talk of literature as a variety of English may seem odd, but it indicates an important difference between the linguistic approach to literature and the more familiar approach of literary criticism. In this paper, it is presupposed that we know in practical terms what we mean by literature, and time will not be spent in defining it. However, perhaps something ought to be said about the concept of literature as a variety of English. It would be more accurate to speak of literature as a variety of varieties of English, for 'variety' can denote very different scales of reference. In a very similar way teachers use 'child' to refer to any human being of either sex between the ages of four and nineteen. The precise connotation is left to be determined by the context in which it is used, or deliberately left vague so that it can refer to 'all those who are taught in schools': it can mean an entry class in an Infants' School; all those in Primary Schools; or all those at school. Similarly, we can use variety to indicate different degrees of inclusiveness. It enables us to refer to the linguistic aspects of certain groupings amongst writers that our intuition leads us to make. Common terms like 'metaphysical poetry' or '18th century pastoral' or 'the early 19th century novel' or 'Restoration comedy' recognise the truism that there are features which many works of literature share in common, whatever particular individuality each may possess. Moreover, we are aware of common features shared by an enormously diverse range of actual poems, plays and novels. Our intuition enables us to refer to them collectively as literature, because it responds to these common features; these features represent from a linguistic point of view a particular way of exploiting the resources of the language. When we refer to literature as a variety of written English, it is this particular exploitation of the language to which we are pointing.

A second reason for concentrating our attention upon matters other than literature relates to certain characteristics of linguistic enquiry as it has developed over the last forty years. Like any other field of enquiry, the progress made with different aspects of linguistic science has depended upon the interaction of two things, the interests and inclinations of its leading practitioners, and the scope of the techniques and procedures available to it at any one time. By and large those who have had most part in developing the subject have had little direct interest in considering literature from a linguistic point of view. It would require a short history of linguistic studies in this century to show why this should be so, and this paper is not the place for it. In one sense, though, the reason is obvious. Considered against the range of language activities men carry on, and the number and fascination of the problems presented by the very fact that we do have language, literature appears as only one amongst the multitude of uses men have for language. From a linguist's point of view, it has no special claim to attention. Moreover, there are sound technical reasons for this comparative neglect of the linguistic study of literature. Though there are limits to what can be said without plunging into a detailed linguistic analysis, it is worth trying to show the nature of the problem, because it may indicate the sort of things a reader whose expectations have been formed by the literary critical study of literature is unlikely to find when he meets linguistic work in literature.

Let us begin by pointing to certain aspects of the way in which literary criticism has developed in this century. The criticism we habitually turn to when we are in search of understanding exhibits a powerful intuitive exploration of the complex relationships which, we sense, give unity to a piece of literature. Any reader can provide his own examples, but one can point to the discussion of Dickens or Conrad or Shakespeare in terms of the patterns of imagery which unify their works, or the radical change modern criticism has made to our understanding of poets like Donne and Hopkins by pointing out the unifying elements in their poems. The very success of such criticism in achieving an intuitively satisfying reading builds up a whole set of expectations that a reader then brings to any discussion of literature.

He becomes accustomed to a highly sophisticated discourse that explores the work in question at many different levels, but especially at a level where the critical concern is with the structure of the poem or novel or play as an organised whole.

Linguists in their turn have developed procedures of considerable sophistication for handling many of the regular patterns that make up a language. We can say a great deal about the distinctive sound pattern of a given language; it is by virtue of one such set of distinctive sound patterns that we know that what we hear is English. There is much in the grammar of a language that can be as successfully described. If we want to ask questions about the way English uses verbs and nouns, subjects and objects; or if we are interested in the form of questions and statements; or if we want to know how statements are qualified, there are full and explicit accounts available. If we are interested in the structures that are available for clauses in English; or if we would like to understand the relation of clause to clause in sentences, again there is much more to inform us than conventional notions of schoolbook grammar would ever suggest. It is significant however that certain things do not appear in this list, notably any word about the coming together of sentences into paragraphs, paragraphs into groups of paragraphs, and so on.(9)

Given a passage of continuous written English, any competent native speaker would know immediately whether or not it was one text, or made up of fragments from several different texts. At many different points between the shortest meaningful phrase we can think of, and a complete work, we are aware of continuities that mark out parts of the whole: as experienced readers we are seldom in doubt about these divisions in a text, or of the fact that the larger units subsume the smaller, until we have the entire text as the largest unit of all. Our doubts about the 'unity' of some novels, such as early Dickens, is a reflection of this intuitive reading experience. This is so familiar an experience that we overlook the questions it raises for anyone wishing to explain how this comes about. Once we are dealing with units larger than sentences, some would even say larger than clauses, the kind of relationship appears to change radically. This fact is registered by the familiar terms we use for referring to the divisions of a text: chapter, section, quatrain, and act, do not have the built-in 'grammatical' connotations that accompany sentence and paragraph. It is already clear however that our intuitions about different extents of unity in a piece of literature are soundly based, and do not derive solely from the 'meaning' of the text in a conventional sense. The task of accounting for linguistic continuities of this kind however is going to require a very different technique from that which has proved so successful with units of language up to the extent of clauses.

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(9) One paper in this series, No. 7 "Grammatical Cohesion in Spoken and Written English", does deal with this area, but it presupposes a fairly extensive knowledge of linguistics.

It may now be apparent why the distance between the linguistic study of literature and the literary critical study of literature should seem so great. It is precisely in terms of continuities, of the patterning of words, and of the meaningfulness of large-scale designs intuitively apprehended and impressionistically described that the best literary criticism of this century excels. The linguist's enormous advances in understanding have come from working at the opposite end, as it were: consequently what he can offer to the study of literature often seems trivial at a first acquaintance. After the sweep of a literary critic, such as Wilson Knight or Northrop Frye in full flight, the linguistic approach is apt to seem ploddingly earth-bound. The truth however is otherwise. The mistake so often made by those who are familiar with a literary critical view of literature is to assume that the linguist is trying to do the same kind of thing, and has simply failed abysmally. If it is understood that he is not trying to be a literary critic; and that his aim is to say what he can about the language a writer has used, considered as one way of using English; then much of the uneasiness his activities cause will vanish.

Enough has been said to show that there is no belittlement of the value of literature for work in English concealed within a linguistic approach to the teaching of English. The question at issue is not whether to use literature -- an absurd question once formulated -- but what part it should play, how best to use it, and what contribution linguistic studies could make at this stage.

In addition to this, there is the very difficult question of what literature can contribute to the total language experience of individual pupils. Certainly many teachers of English are sure that exposure to literature does give their pupils increased command of their language. It is so much the standard working assumption that our virtual ignorance of what this really means in terms of an individual's knowledge of his language is easily forgotten. Nevertheless, it is a working assumption that we must continue to act upon: the relationship between pupils' experience of literature, and their enhanced power to handle both spoken and written English, is too well attested by teachers' practical classroom experience to be lightly set aside. The very potency of this relationship however should encourage us to learn all we can about the processes involved: we need to be able to see both what they can achieve, and what they can not.

The linguist can contribute a great deal to our search for a more explicit understanding of the processes involved than we now possess. If we wish to consider our pupils' experience of literature as a major agent in developing their command of language because we believe it to provide an inexhaustible richness of example; then it is very necessary that we should be fully conscious of its possible limitations in this direction. One thing the linguist may be able to do is to show us the linguistic features that make literature a recognisable major variety of written English: this would enable us to see what patterns of the language it shared with other varieties, and what patterns set it apart from them. Thus we may be able to see more clearly than we now do the directions in which our pupils' command of language is likely to move when they draw strongly upon their experiences of the language of literature. This hope is phrased tentatively, because it would be wrong to expect too much at this stage from so relatively new an area of exploration as the linguistic differentiation of varieties. Enough has been done already however to offer some highly suggestive lines of thought to teachers who care to make use of them: for instance it may be the case that certain ways of increasing the information load which a clause can carry are not widely exploited in the writing of literature, whereas they are called upon to play a very important part in certain other ways of writing, those we properly associate with the humanities or natural science.

III

Literature in the Classroom

So far this enquiry has been more directly concerned with the teacher and his attitudes to his work than his practice in the classroom: we now need to look at some of the more familiar ways of using literature as subject matter for work in English: this can then lead us to a discussion of the particular ways in which an acquaintance with linguistic studies might help the teacher to cope with some of the problems that they raise. Let us begin by citing four representative lessons as a reminder of how complex and varied are the uses to which we put literature in the classroom. It must be said that these are mere outlines, guides to the recollection of practice that will be very familiar to most readers: a full and sufficient description of such lessons as these, together with a revealing analysis, would require a paper to itself. Indeed, it is a paper that will follow in the second series, for such a description in depth, examined from a linguistic point of view, is one very direct way of demonstrating in detail many of the points that can only be touched upon in an introductory paper such as this. This matter is taken up again in Section V however, and need not now detain us. Let us take these four lesson sketches, remembering that they are only intended to be an aide-memoire to our enquiry.

The first does not begin with a piece of literature at all. Its origin is the newspaper reports of the earthquakes in Sicily in January of this year. These are read, and lead to an extended discussion of the sudden impact of unforeseen disaster upon a small community. There is reference to Skopje and Algeria. At this point, the teacher narrows the focus to the theme of personal loss, because he sees that he can use the interest generated by the reports and the discussion to carry the class into reading, and then talking about, a group of poems and related passages of prose. Whether the initial stimulus leads to specific work with literature, or whether it leads to working on a theme which may bring in literature amongst much other material, the situation outlined here will be clear enough to any experienced teacher. Such a public happening can offer itself either as a way into something which is then to be read and explained for its own sake, or as a way of showing how the literature a class has read can come to their aid in trying to make sense of the world.

The second lesson presents a very different situation. Most examinations in English literature still require study of prescribed texts. Frequently, they aim to test knowledge about the text by asking for paraphrase, or notes on a passage that will relate it to the whole. Even if they do not, it is clear that many teachers use these procedures themselves when working on a set book, especially perhaps with what they would regard as a less able class. If the set book is a Shakespeare play for instance, there are teachers who would go so far as to dictate to their pupils a line by line version of it. Whether the teacher provides the version in 'modern English', or merely requires it of the pupil, a very different kind of activity is going on in relation to the text than anything we might expect to find in lessons of the first type. Setting aside for the moment any evaluation of the two, one could say that there had been a major shift of focus in the lesson from an activity that was primarily experiential, coming to terms with unfamiliar and disturbing events, to one that involved highly specific and restricted linguistic activities. In the first case, literature comes to the aid of pupils by supporting their search for understanding, it is an adjunct to a central concern with the experience itself: in the second, literature has become subject matter in the narrow sense, the data for a set of operations, like a problem in mathematics.

Let us take two more examples. Both involve a reading of Philip Larkin's poem 'Ambulances'. In the first case, a class of fourth year pupils has been listening to a group of poems by contemporary poets all centred around the impact on ordinary people of living in cities. It culminates in a reading of 'Ambulances'. They are pupils in a big London Comprehensive, and would be described as 'average', that is, they are in their last year of school, and are already looking beyond it to the life they want to lead once it is done with. The reading is very successful. In particular, 'Ambulances' holds their interest. Their teacher could have used the poem to lead into the sort of exploration of experience that was the core of the first lesson described above. Instead, he uses it as a point of departure from which the whole class set out to explore a range of social facts that might include anything from finding out how the local hospital runs a casualty department to the impact of a man's serious injury at work upon his family. The important thing here is that the exploration is to be understood literally. The class go and find out the facts for themselves. The poem has merely acted as a releaser for a range of activity which constitutes a kind of pragmatic social study.

In the second case, a class of fifth year pupils in the same school, the top stream, and strongly oriented towards success in future public examinations, have been using the Critical Quarterly's pamphlet in which 'Ambulances' appears, as an introduction to contemporary poetry. The poem becomes the focus of a discussion that is primarily concerned with it as a highly organised piece of written English. What takes place is a literary critical discussion in which the pupils are regarding the poem as an object in itself, worth talking about for its own sake. In order to take part in the discussion a pupil has to find a language for talking about literature, however rudimentary this may be. If such a lesson were recorded, it would probably be clear from the tape that one of the most significant things going on was the teacher's own contribution to the discussion, because it provided the pupils' chief source of the language they needed, if they were to contribute to the discussion (and similar future discussions) themselves.

In each of these four lessons literature occurs as in some sense the subject matter of the lesson, but what is done with it in each case differs enormously. If we ask of each lesson, what is being learnt; what part the literature plays in the learning; and what kind of experience is involved: experience of literature, of something else, or of both; then the complex nature of the lessons becomes apparent. In each case, we can give a rough answer. Certainly it is clear that an enjoyable experience of literature for its own sake was a part of the first and the fourth lesson. Though different in every other respect, the second and third lessons both subordinated the literature involved to other ends than its enjoyment for its own sake. With the fourth lesson, the teacher's focus was certainly on the poem, but he was also concerned with the quality of the discussion, the kind of language his pupils could bring to talking about a poem. Without carrying the analysis of the lessons any further, the complexity of the linguistic activity involved is apparent. These representative lessons remind us that no one activity is likely to be going on in a lesson to the exclusion of all others, though occasionally it may look as though this is so.

It is this mixture of different activities within one lesson, however, or a group of lessons, that gives to work in English a certain intractable quality, a resistance to analysis: and it is this quality which has led many teachers to believe that any kind of analysis is more or less futile, because the 'real' meaning of the work done would necessarily escape the process of analysis. As another paper(10) in this series points out, this is to place an enormous weight upon the charismatic personality of the teacher, and a most unreasonable burden upon any teacher (that is the vast majority) who does not have this power. The kind of analysis which follows does not say anything that is not already familiar to experienced teachers of English, but by presenting certain well known matters in a certain order, and by making some simple distinctions, it may encourage a closer look at that experience, and enable a teacher both to be more aware of what it is that he does with literature in the classroom and more able to convey to others the nature of his work.

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(10) Paper No. 1 "The Relevance of Linguistics to the Teacher of English", Section II.

If we are going to be able to handle the enormous diversity such lesson situations as these present to us, we must have a framework that will enable us to group them together in a meaningful way for discussion. Considered as a body literature, and the activities to which it can give rise, represent an impossibly varied subject matter, but if we consider in the most general terms the ways in which it becomes the focus for work in the classroom, it is possible to begin with as few as three major categories to mark significant distinctions between types of lessons. Such a set of categories will serve a double purpose: it will enable us to show more clearly where linguistic studies bear upon the teacher's classroom problems; and it will demonstrate one way of classifying our lessons in literature that could facilitate any public discussion of the problems involved. Hopefully, it might be one way of counteracting the strong tendency for all discussion of this kind to turn upon the participant's response to anecdotes about particular lessons: in itself this would not necessarily lead to an unfruitful exploration, but the anecdotes are apt to be presented in so personal a way that a teacher who does not happen to have the same assumptions about teaching literature as the man reporting the anecdote can well feel that nothing of value is being said. Moreover, it quite frequently happens that the anecdotes are presented as though they were the equivalent of general truths about the teaching of English: this is seldom the deliberate intention of the individual concerned, and reveals the degree to which we lack a sufficiently public way of talking about our activities in the classroom.

The framework that is offered in Section IV tries to overcome these limitations in our customary ways of talking by putting forward a grouping of lesson situations according to a clearly expressed principle: what is the relationship between pupil, text and activity. Needless to say, any analysis of this kind is scarcely likely to satisfy every reader, but it is hoped that the account which follows will show how the distinctions relate to real differences in the practice of teachers and the experience of pupils. The object of any scheme for analysis of a complex whole like a lesson is to show more clearly than would otherwise be the case just what the different features which make up the complex might be contributing to its total character: if we can find an insightful analysis we can reasonably hope that one product of it will be a way of talking about the complexities that is available to anyone who cares to read the analysis. What now follows is a tentative first step towards this desirable end.

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IV

Three Ways of Using Literature in the Classroom

In presenting an analysis of this kind, an initial grouping has to be decided upon, because the finer distinctions one wants to make are too numerous to handle directly: one must have reasons for making the distinctions one makes; and these reasons must be discernible to any reader who cares to look for them. If we start with the literature itself, we can suggest three distinct groups of activities to which it can lead; and we can classify them according to the place literature occupies in the lesson. So much else that goes on in the classroom is determined by the teacher's attitude to the literature he uses that the degree to which he makes it the focus of attention for his lessons is an obvious point of departure.

Therefore we can make these differences in focus the basis of our major distinctions: situations in which the text remains the ostensible centre of interest, but the real purpose has become the imparting of information, biographical or historical or social; and those in which the centre of interest has shifted from the text to the pupil's experience, so that the text becomes subordinate to their needs in relation to it. The following paragraphs explore the implications of this three-fold division; it remains true to say that within each division the various kinds of classroom activity discussed are to be found in many different combinations in actual lessons. Seldom will we find a lesson that makes use of one only from those that are described: teaching for GCE literature examinations is perhaps the one big exception to this rule.

Let us now look at each major category in a little more detail. As the foregoing suggests, we will name them according to the focus of interest that distinguishes them: thus the first category we can call 'text-centred'; the second, 'information-centred'; and the third 'experience-centred'. In text-centred situations, the teacher regards the literatures he uses as the primary object of attention. The text is the major, perhaps the only, vehicle for the work to be done in the lesson. Both the second and the fourth of the lessons outlined in the previous section are of this kind. A teacher whose basic preconceptions about the teaching of literature are covered by this category is likely to favour lessons, syllabuses and examinations in which the literature is specified, and the teacher's task is to present his pupils with the chosen text. Their needs and interests may be entirely subordinate to it. However a look at the two lessons referred to above shows that this is not necessarily the case. A major difference between the second and the fourth lesson, both of which are centred on the text, lies in the fact that only the second is subordinating the pupils' interests to it. The description of the fourth makes clear that the pupils' concentration upon the text derived from their own interest in it.

Our second category, information-centred situations, will be familiar to all readers of this paper. They occur when it seems necessary to provide detailed information about matters related to a text, but not arising directly from its study. Interrupting the reading of a Shakespeare comedy in order to give an extended account of Elizabethan stage conventions would be a typical example:

digressing from a study of Hopkins' poetry to a study of his personality would be another. A special case is presented by teachers who come to use such situations so extensively that they sometimes end up by treating the text itself as a kind of information. This habit occasionally shows itself in the choice of questions for the public examinations: the following example from a past O-level literature paper is an extreme case - 'What has your study of Henry IV Part I told you about (a) English inns (b) Welsh superstition.'

The third major category, experience-centred situations, shares some features with the last mentioned in that the teacher is interested in something other than the literature which he is using; but it is sharply distinguished from this category, and from the first, because it is now the experience of the pupils themselves that constitutes the centre of interest for him. Referring again to the lesson outlines(11) in the last section, it is clear that both one and three are essentially situations of this kind. They are each a good example of the position literature is likely to occupy in the lessons of someone making much use of this kind of situation in his classroom: literature is one source amongst many for the work he will plan, and it will often be no more than an adjunct to several other activities, as in the case of the third lesson. It may well lead to a further situation in which the interest of the class has become firmly centred upon the text for its own sake, a situation to be found in the first lesson, and appropriately described by our first category, text-centred. The literature could equally well lead in the other direction however, as it does in the third lesson, and become the means for initiating the collection of information of many different kinds. In this case it is an obvious example of our second category, information-centred. As the third lesson was described, this collection of information was seen as a dynamic process, producing a valuable extension of the pupils' experience. In less skilful hands however, it could well have become no more than the assembling of miscellaneous packets of data: the text would appear to provide some sort of framework which could relate them, and make them meaningful for the pupils, but in reality it might well be forgotten, and so the information collected would remain inert. The final effect would be very close to the more unfortunate examples of conventional information-centred situations in which 'notes' come to obliterate the text they are supposed to make more meaningful.(12)

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(11) Op. cit., p. 37.

It has been assumed throughout this paper that the reader already possesses some general notion of the field of activity proper to linguistic studies. He will be aware that linguistics is concerned with the study of language, its nature and form, as an attribute of human personality and human society. He is likely to connect it with what he understands by 'grammar'; with questions of usage; with the study of speech; and perhaps with the historical study of language, which he may have experienced under the heading of philology as part of his own studies in English. If we assume that very few

(12) A notorious example is provided by the customary school editions of Chaucer in which 'notes' often account for as much as 80% of the whole book.

readers will have had the opportunity to carry their knowledge of linguistics very much further than this, a discussion of the linguistic study of literary texts which made detailed use of the appropriate linguistic techniques would be out of place. What can be done is to take in turn each of the three primary distinctions which we have just explored, and show in broad outline the kind of contribution linguistic studies might be able to make to the teacher's work within them.

Let us first consider a text-centred situation. The teacher's aim is to give his pupils as full an understanding of the literature discussed as possible. He has to mediate between the complexities of the text and the level of understanding he can hope for in his pupils. His success will depend in part upon his ability to grasp the nature of these complexities, and determine what comment will help his pupils most directly: so much we take for granted. The important question for us to consider here is the nature of the teacher's knowledge of the text. Those who teach literature with any seriousness of purpose are aware of the central part played in their teaching by a developed intuitive understanding of the way literature works: that is to say that a teacher brings to bear upon the literature he chooses to use in the classroom his previous experience of similar works; his total experience of reading literature; and something we shall have to call his experience of the world. The teacher's professional concern with literature provides him with an especially acute understanding of the ways in which writers draw upon the resources of the language to construct unique patterns of rhythm and metaphor, character and plot. All this is certainly part of what we mean when we talk about a teacher's knowledge of the text.

There is something else however. Any piece of written English represents a particular selection of the possibilities which the formal patterns of the language make available to any native speaker. The writer's use of these patterns, and the reader's understanding of them, are so deeply internalised that neither writer nor reader can be said to be aware of them as patterns in the act of writing or reading; even when the act of choosing from the patterns available is a conscious struggle for the writer, or making sense of them requires a reader to make a similar effort, neither see them as patterns. At present, a teacher of English is likely to be no different from any other reader in this respect. His understanding of these formal patterns is usually confined to what his intuitions as a native speaker tell him. Certainly, his professional concern with the teaching of literature may have made these intuitions particularly acute, but this very acuteness may itself be a problem. It makes so much insight into the text available to the teacher that he may well be faced with a double difficulty: he may seriously misjudge his pupils' possible level of response, because he has lost sight of the degree to which his own linguistic intuitions have been developed by his prolonged professional involvement with literature: and even when he has his pupils' capabilities very firmly in mind, he is still faced with the problem of finding words for what he knows about the text that will succeed in conveying the knowledge to his pupils. When he asks a class to accept a particular way of talking about literature, it is often no easy task to judge how great a strain this may put upon the pupil's ability to use the same way of talking himself. A teacher may well feel that he has achieved a successful translation of his own understanding of the text into a form easily accessible to his pupils, and yet in reality leave them with an impossible task. The teacher has talked about the text in so private a way that his own words are literally the only ones available to the class for talking about it. In order to be able to participate in the lesson at all, they are forced to rely upon the teacher's own phraseology. They may be adept at handling this, but it lies too far beyond the limits of their own ability to use language for them to be able to assimilate it, and thereby extend their own capacity to talk about a text.

A very common response to this dilemma is to question the value of the activity that gives rise to it. Many teachers seem now to deny the practical value of talking about literature at all, because the gap between their intuitive 'understanding' of the text and any form of words both accessible to their pupils and true to their own 'understanding' seems impossibly large. They prefer to concentrate upon making available to their pupils an active experience of literature by embedding it in a context along with many other activities. That is, their work in English is exclusively experience-centred. In one sense, no one is going to deny the validity of this emphasis. Certainly, experience of literature would not seem so vital a thing, if all that it means for pupils' personal and linguistic development could be conveniently expounded. Talking about literature is unlikely to be a profitable end in itself as far as the classroom is concerned.

At a theoretical level, a thorough-going 'experiential' teaching does seem possible, even if one would want to question the wisdom of some examples we have seen in the last few years. In the classroom situation however two things obtrude: some teachers may be free to ignore the problems of talking about literature in any formal sense, that is, virtually exclude from their classrooms text-centred situations, but the majority are not. They are faced with public examinations in literature, and they have to find an effective classroom language for talking about set books, so that whatever a teacher's attitude to talking about the literature he uses, it is at least certain that he will have to do it. From this point of view what matters most is the teacher's own understanding of the literature he uses. It is in this context that an explicit knowledge of the formal patterns of the language would be a material aid to his understanding. A teacher who grew familiar with an adequate linguistic description of English would have a powerful new instrument added to his present equipment for the study of literature. In particular, he would be likely to draw from it a most valuable insight into the relationship between his highly developed intuitions about specific aspects of a text, and the particular linguistic choices a writer had made to produce them.(12)

Experienced students of literature have available to them a highly developed technique for the critical discussion of literature. As we all know, this has been a major achievement of literary criticism in the course of the last four decades, embodied in the best practice of critics, both writers and academics. A shaping principle of this criticism has been the need to stay close to the

(12) The articles by Michael Gregory and J.M. Sinclair in A Review of English Literature, Vol. 6, No. 2, Longmans 1965, are good examples of what a reader might find helpful: he will also find others in A. McIntosh and M.A.K. Halliday, Patterns of Language (papers 2, 3, 4 and 5), Longmans 1966.

text, to talk about 'the poem on the page': this has produced a body of comment of real distinction, subtle in its dealings with the work discussed, and satisfying to our intuitive understanding of its power. While it is obviously true that critical discussion of this quality remains a rare accomplishment, the teaching of English has come to rest increasingly upon the assumption that literary studies can provide a rational basis for teaching literature in the classroom, because it is possible to derive a simulacrum of this approach from practising it as a student. On many occasions however a teacher may have considerable difficulty in trying to relate his initial 'reading' of the text to the actual words on the page. It is easy to say that this is merely inexpertness, but it could also be that the literary critical 'close reading' is not as immediately helpful a technique as it appears to be. The crux of the matter is what we mean by the language of the text. From a literary critical point of view, this is essentially a complex pattern of interrelated 'meanings', for the most part intuitively apprehended; and expressed publicly by means of a commentary that formulates the 'meanings' without reducing them to mere paraphrase.

In the criticism that has provided the writer of this paper, and most of its readers, with their model for talking about literature, 'the language of the text' embraces all that we customarily understand by the word 'meaning': a 'close reading' is expected to throw light upon the pattern of interrelated 'meanings' that the text embodies: and it has to do this without reducing its 'meanings' to the banality of a plain prose restatement of them. When we read critical work of this kind, the response it draws from us is frequently similar to the response literature itself would elicit: the critic is bent upon recreating for his reader his own intuitive response to the 'meanings' of the text: consequently the 'close reading' involved is seldom apprehended as an analytical process. It is hardly surprising therefore that the technique of 'close reading' seldom shows clearly the link between a writer's 'meanings' and the formal features of the language that he has selected to carry them: the closer a reading gets to 'the language of the text' in this sense, the more impressionistic it is likely to become. An approach from a linguistic point of view however would lay stress upon just this aspect of a complete 'reading'. It would want to give an explicit account of the formal features of a text: the writer's exploitation of the ways in which the written mode is derived from the spoken, especially in matters of rhythm and intonation: his selection from the patterns of grammar and lexis available to him: and the significance of his formal choices in relation to 'meanings'.(13) Put in these terms, it ought to be clear that this is not a rival way of 'reading' a text, but an approach essentially complementary to the literary critical approach familiar to all readers of this paper.

The weak point in our present practice as teachers of literature lies in the uncertainty with which our response to the text can be related to specific features in the language of the text. Our developed literary critical power as readers can produce readings that are both subtle and intuitively satisfying; in the present circumstances however, the closer they move towards the actual detail of the formal linguistic choices that a

(13) The reader is referred back to the works mentioned in note 12, p. 57, for good examples of what this can mean in relation to specific texts.

writer has made, the more impressionistic these readings will be. We recognise that the pattern of 'meanings' that our critical technique operates upon is a necessary part of our knowledge of the text: we ought now to recognise that our knowledge is incomplete unless we are able to add to this some understanding of the linguistic patterns embodied in the text, the product of the particular choices that a writer has made amongst those which his language makes available to him.

When we say this however, we must remember that this understanding is something to be added to the teacher's own approach to the literature which he teaches: we do not want it to be thought that this is to advocate the use of the technical language of linguistics for talking about literature in the classroom. We can draw an analogy with critical studies: an experienced teacher is fully aware of the way in which his own understanding of relevant critical writings permeates his actual teaching of literature; yet he does not expect to use its technical language in the classroom without very considerable modification. The understanding that he has derived from these studies is part of what he brings to his teaching, part of what we may reasonably call his professional competence as a teacher of English, and not a source of new material for lessons. An understanding of the linguistic patterns of literature would contribute to his professional competence in an exactly similar fashion: it would not be subject matter to put directly before pupils, but a major aid in the teacher's search for a way of talking about literature.

V

Information-centred and Experience-centre Situations

If we now turn to the other two major categories, information-centred and experience-centred situations, we find a rather different situation. Information-centred situations by definition involve a moving away from the text into some other study, or a point of departure for some kind of activity, so that on the face of it there would seem to be little that linguistic studies could contribute. If we confine our notion of a contribution from linguistic studies to direct help with the formal features of the language, then this is largely true. Linguistic studies may appear at first sight less immediately relatable to the actual classroom situation in both information-centred and experience-centred work than is the case with text-centred activity: the teacher is here concerned however with classroom situations(14) in which the language activity going on may well be the most

(14) Situations like those contained in the first and third lesson outlined above in Section III, p. 37.

important element of the total learning experience that these lessons represent. The aim of this section is to show that linguistic studies could help the teacher to gain a much more accurate idea of what is going on in a lesson of this kind: an explicit knowledge of linguistic structure, function, and variety might well offer a better basis for assessing the value of linguistic activities in such lessons than his unaided linguistic intuitions could provide.

When we consider information-centred situations, it is immediately obvious that they are very similar to many of the things that go on in classrooms whatever the subject concerned. Although they involve literature at the start, the activity that follows often corresponds to a common expository mode that any subject teacher is likely to make use of: consequently the contribution linguistics can make in this context is not really particular to the study of literature, or to work in English, as was the case with text-centred activities; it is one example of the basic value of linguistic studies for all teachers, whatever their chosen field of operations. This matter is discussed in several papers(15) of this series, but nevertheless there are important things to be said about information-centred situations that can best appear in the context of this paper.

Let us start with a recognisable basic principle common to almost all secondary school teaching as we now know it: the majority of teachers regard the presentation of subject matter as a central part of their task; the basis of their professional standing as a teacher rests upon their command of that subject matter. Necessarily, language is the medium through which the bulk of their work has to be conducted: linguistic studies provide an understanding of the medium which is comparable to the understanding of subject matter -- something that all teachers accept as necessary. This understanding involves the vital distinction between knowledge of and knowledge about one's native language that is discussed

(15) See especially
Paper No. 1: "The Relevance of Linguistics for the Teaching of English".
Paper No. 2: "The Subject Matter of English".
Paper No. 4: "Current Attitudes to Written English".

in the introductory paper to this series.(16) The majority of human beings grow to be competent speakers of their native language: and we can refer to this competence as their knowledge of their language. When the linguist refers to the intuitions of the native speaker, as he frequently does, it is to this knowledge that he refers. Knowledge about one's own language is just as much a matter of conscious and detailed rational study as knowledge about physics or history or literature which forms the basis of most teachers' professional activities.

We are all familiar however with a certain kind of knowledge about any subject in which we have a special interest that is quite distinct from the knowledge about of a specialist, or an informed and intelligent layman. Depending upon our position, we may perhaps refer to it as either the commonsense view of the matter, or the rank prejudice of the uninformed. It amounts to the knowledge about the matter, be it the history of England, the origin of species, the fission of particles, or the use of English, that a man acquires simply by virtue of his

(16) "The Relevance of Linguistics to the Teacher of English", Section I.

having grown up in a certain society at a certain time. In relation to language this knowledge about is a serious matter, for everyone possesses a measure of it, because everyone is a user of English. Moreover, there is a marked tendency for this knowledge about language to remain unmodified by any more objective standard, because the public discussion of language matters is seldom based upon any other kind of knowledge about language. These assumptions we all make about the structure and function of language which are based solely upon our individual and social experience of its use, can be referred to as our 'folk linguistic' knowledge about language. Certain well-known phrases that we might expect to find in many common rooms are a good indication of what is meant by the term: 'ugly speech', 'good English', or 'correct English', phrases which embody the notion of a universally agreed written standard; and this in its turn brings with it others such as 'corrupt language', or 'debased English'; 'barbarous jargon' and 'clear English'; and so on.

If we mean by prejudice a deeply felt assumption which has not been modified by a rational examination of the facts, then it is fair to say that our 'folk linguistic' represents the stock of knowledge about language enshrined in the linguistic prejudices of a particular community, large or small. Teachers are as much inheritors of a 'folk linguistic' as any other members of the community, and it remains for the majority the most pervasive source of their knowledge about language: it is upon this that they draw in order to solve the intractable language problems that they meet in the classroom. There is no doubt that the pressure of these problems has led some teachers to develop an intuitive understanding of them that is highly sophisticated: yet there are many others who rely upon a comparatively unrefined 'folk linguistic' which cannot help to explain the language difficulties pupils face in the classroom. A common instance will surely be familiar to many readers: the colleague who blames his pupils' difficulties upon their lack of 'ability' rather than the nature of the linguistic tasks he requires of them. He is likely to measure 'ability' by the success with which certain linguistic operations are conducted, like writing continuous discursive prose, or being able to understand the technical variety of English proper to his subject:(17) and his 'folk linguistic' encourages him to believe that anyone who has the necessary intelligence can do these things without being told how to do them. His 'folk linguistic' prevents him from seeing that he is arguing in a circle.

The teacher of English has a particular need to be able to transcend the limitations of a 'folk linguistic' knowledge about language: a general understanding of language from a linguistic point of view, what we may call a linguistic perspective, will be relevant to any part of his work; and it is in this sense that we can suggest that linguistic studies are relevant to information-centred situations in the English class. This would enable him to predict much more precisely the nature of the language tasks that might follow from a lesson situation of this type: to judge the relative values of those tasks for the pupils concerned: and to estimate their probable success in being able to find the right variety of English for the particular tasks that he would ask them to take up.

In that very different type of information-centred situation which we know only too well as 'background', a linguistic knowledge of language might make him more aware of the complexity of the linguistic tasks that he is likely to impose upon his pupils. It will rapidly appear that once more we have something which is common to many classrooms, and not peculiar to work in English: it is reasonable to suggest however that only the teacher of English is well-placed to give the matter detailed attention; and that a clear understanding of these complexities as they occur in his own teaching of literature would give him a powerful insight into the linguistic problems which his pupils face in every classroom.

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(17) See especially Paper No. 4: "Current Attitudes to Written English".

Let us say that he is committed to teaching Little Dorrit. He decides that he ought to talk about the penal system, and the imprisonment of debtors, for he is sure that his class are virtually ignorant of what mid-Victorian society was really like. He wants to avoid as much as possible the formalities of an exposition: he plans to spend perhaps two or three lessons talking about the social context out of which the novel came, for which he prepares his own notes: he indicates to his pupils that taking 'notes' might be useful. He is surprised at the poor result when he asks for a piece of written work that would make use of the material expounded. He has assumed, as the majority do perhaps, that listening to his exposition and taking 'notes' is really a very straightforward affair. Let us now list the points in a learning situation of this kind which necessitate some marked linguistic activity, the implications of which are not as obvious as they may seem:

1. the teacher prepares a set of written notes;
2. he reads them out loud;
3. he frequently exemplifies his written material as he reads it;
4. he interpolates spoken comments;
5. he writes comments on the board.

The pupils' activity can be broken down in a similar way:

1. they write in rough their versions of the teacher's exposition;
2. individual pupils ask questions, the answers to which become part of the 'information content' of the lesson;

3. then they write up their 'notes' from their rough draft,
4. to fill in the gaps they have recourse to
   a) the written notes of their friends
   b) their spoken comment
   c) a text book
5. they use this material in some extended piece of written work.

Ultimately, they may be expected to use both 'notes' and written work as the basis of an examination answer after a considerable lapse of time.

At each stage in the above lists pupil and teacher have to carry out a number of complex linguistic processes, and there are many such situations in which the later stages depend upon the successful performance of the earlier stages by both teacher and pupil, for the pupil to know what is happening. This is not the place to comment in detail upon the processes involved, but we can say that the efficient performance of each stage marked should not be taken for granted. For instance item 2 in the teacher's list raises the question of redundancy in spoken language, a device built into natural language which seeks to ensure two things: that learners will in fact receive enough of the message to know what is being said; and that the message content will not exceed in density the rate at which a learner can interpret it. This second point is not merely a complicated way of saying that a teacher must match his material to the ability of his pupils: it refers to the well-attested fact that there is something like a physical limit to the rate at which we can 'process' information, irrespective of our intellectual ability to make sense of it when 'processed'.

In a written text the relative lack of interference with our reception of the text makes possible a very considerable reduction in the necessary level of redundancy. A good example of this is the difference between hearing a talk on the radio and then reading it in 'The Listener': a talk that comes over the air as a tightly packed discourse, just at the limit of what we can follow without strain, may seem loosely discursive when we come to read it on the page. Conversely, a well written paper may go well beyond the limit of what an audience can reasonably be expected to receive should the writer forget he is writing a text that will be spoken and not read.

The last of our three major categories, experience-centred situations, requires a relationship between linguistic studies and the work of the classroom different again from the close links possible in text-centred situations and from the role of linguistic perspective in information-centred situations. Consider for a moment the teacher's objective in all three cases: in the first, this must be his pupils' understanding of the literature in question; in the second, their understanding of the information, whether expounded by the teacher or gathered by themselves; in the third, what? Probably the most inclusive answer would have to be the pupil's understanding of his own experience. While the ostensible subject matter of the lesson can be almost anything one cares to mention, the real 'subject matter' is the pupil's own experience. The teacher's attention is directed towards a double end: enlarging that experience through confronting the pupil with literature, and with all the occasions for talking and writing that he can devise: and enabling the pupil to make sense of both this new experience, and his total experience of the world.

An essential element in all experience-centred work therefore must be the pupil's own use of language. The principle involved contains two basic assumptions, one about language learning, and one about the relationship between language and personality. Man learns language by using it to make sense of the world in which he finds himself: he assimilates new experience by ordering it through language: this dynamic relationship between language and experience is the chief means by which a human being achieves an individual personality. If we observe this process as it occurs in children and young people; and if we consult our own encounter with new experience, and our awareness of extensions in our power to use language; we find that this dynamic relationship is first acted out in talk, before it is available for writing.

A secondary assumption is that literature provides the major source of vicarious experience available to the teacher: and that this experience becomes available to the pupil through talking about it. Once available to him, it can then become the point of departure for his own writing, which will, hopefully, show signs that he can now find the language necessary for making better sense of his own direct experience of the world. As was said above, this view of work in English is now very familiar, and it certainly shows its influence in the work of many teachers. We are not here concerned with its basic validity as an approach to English teaching, but with the contribution linguistic studies might make towards carrying it out.

In one respect the position is very similar to the text-centred situation. There the argument was that the teacher's ability to understand the linguistic structure of a text would be a powerful aid to his classroom task of translating his own understanding of the text into terms available to his pupils. When a teacher commits himself to a preponderance of experience-centred situations in his work, then the real 'subject matter' of his lessons is not a text, or 'experience', but his pupils' means of recording and presenting that experience: that is to say, language itself. The teacher's need to escape from the limitations of a 'folk linguistic' understanding of language becomesall the more pressing in such a situation as this.

Consider one aspect of the relationship between spoken and written language. If the teacher believes that talk enables a pupil to internalise new features of the language which he is then able to rehearse for himself in future discussion, and thereafter employ in his writing, then the teacher needs to have a very clear idea of the great differences between spoken and written language. 'Folk linguistic' can talk about 'easy fluent speech', and the image suggests an uninterrupted flow of well-modulated sound -- in fact, something like well written prose, only spoken. Actual speech is very different. As recent work has shown, 'fluent speech is 50% silence'. It is also marked by hesitations like 'er', 'um', 'y'know', 'that is' and so on. Far from being a sign of 'slip-shod' or 'clumsy' expression they are an habitual element in all adult speech, a necessary feature of its production. One can almost say that the more fluent the speech in the 'folk linguistic' sense, the less like the speech of everyday situations it is likely to be.

A great deal more needs to be said in detail about the specific relevance of different aspects of linguistics to experience-centred situations: here we only have space to note one or two aspects of such situations which stand to gain from a specifically linguistic examination. As many teachers have been ready to point out in their criticism of experience-centred work, control over the total activity going on in the classroom is difficult to maintain because the pupils very often cease to be taught as a single body, and carry on the work in small groups. Direction of the work then presents problems in two quite different ways: a teacher needs to know whether or not 'they're learning anything'; and how he can 'maintain order'. We need to be able to assess the value of a very wide range of linguistic activities in order to be able to estimate the value of the learning that has gone on in an experience-centred situation: and something has already been said about the part linguistic studies might play in this. It is not so immediately apparent perhaps that they have just as useful a contribution to make in relation to the second matter.

The particular way in which a teacher extends his control over a class is probably the least consciously observed area of his classroom practice: certainly, he is not likely to be aware of the particular way of speaking that he employs for this purpose; or even that he possesses a distinct way of speaking for exercising control. The method, or system, which a teacher has to develop in order to exercise control verbally over a class, becomes so much second nature to him that it is habitually a feature of all his lessons; and it has a decisive effect upon the kinds of activity that are possible in his classrooms, whatever his chosen plan for his work may be. This is because our habitual way of speaking, our system of verbal control, plays a major part in determining our pupils' notions of what a teacher will regard as acceptable behaviour in his class: consequently, his way of speaking will have a decisive effect upon the kinds of activity that he hopes to encourage. Experience-centred work encourages an informal classroom pattern in which it is seldom profitable to treat the class as one unit for any length of time: if a teacher's aim is work of this kind, and he brings to it habits of verbal control which he has developed for coping with a class en bloc, he may well be severely disappointed at how little he can achieve, blame the method, and drop it as unworkable. Whatever else may have happened, at least part of his failure is likely to have been his inability to persuade his pupils to adopt an active role in his lessons: and his customary way of exercising verbal control could well be the cause of his failure. He has acquired an habitual way of speaking which inhibits his pupils from doing what he wants them to do: they have learnt to associate this way of speaking with a way of behaving that requires them to take up a passive and receptive role in the classroom. Moreover, they may grow very hostile, because they sense a gap between the things which they are being asked to do and the way of speaking which is doing the asking: they are then put in the position of not being at all sure what is really required of them. Any experienced teacher knows the demoralising effect this situation will have upon all concerned.

The effect, then, of our own ways of speaking upon our pupils' willingness and ability to learn can scarcely be overestimated; and the effect of our habitual way of exercising verbal control in the classroom is particularly marked; our teaching of literature is peculiarly sensitive to these effects; and our present ability to understand the processes involved is often seriously limited by our 'folk linguistic' notions. We need to be able to grasp the aspects of language behaviour which most affect relationships in the classroom: and where linguistic factors outside the direct control of teacher or pupil affect the kinds of relationship possible in the classroom. We can cite one specific example of this: we are all familiar with the notion of the school as a community: in so far as a school does have the characteristics of an autonomous institution, it will be sure to develop marked conventions about the ways of speaking that are customary for both staff and pupils; and it will certainly give to any pupil a strong sense of the kinds of classroom participation that go with different systems of verbal control that are to be found within it. The English Department frequently feels the force of this, just because the teaching of literature is likely to encourage vigorous departures from the ways of speaking that pupils will have come to expect.

VI

Conclusion

All the way through this paper the emphasis has been upon the introductory and exploratory nature of what was being said: a great many assumptions about the needs and attitudes of teachers have been made: underlying them have been three major assumptions which provide the rationale for the paper. The first is that it has been assumed throughout that 'enabling' studies are relevant to a teacher's practical problems: that a teacher can gain help and support from knowledge about an area of his work which provides a genuine insight into its structure and its problems, even if it is unlikely to provide any increase in the stock of directly teachable material at his disposal. That the flexible approach to work in English, vigorously developed in recent years, is essentially the right one has been the second assumption: 'English' is not a subject matter to be expounded, but a set of activities in which pupils engage; and by means of which they come to extend their control over both language and experience. The third is a product of both the others: the more flexible the classroom pattern becomes, the more necessary it is for the teacher to be able to understand all that is going on; and to do this effectively, he cannot rely solely upon intuition supported by experience.

In examining the teaching of literature, this paper has tried to suggest how these principles relate to a central area of work in English: they have been built into the discussion of each type of learning situation described, text-centred, information-centred, and experience-centred. That discussion moreover may have suggested another feature common to all current work in English: the question of control over the work being done. Control is an awkward word, suggesting too readily the teacher's imposition of a rigidly pre-determined frame upon all classroom activity. In the context of this paper however, and the work of the Programme, the principle involved is very different. Control over the work being done relates to the teacher's total grasp of all that is going on, and his understanding of the directions that the work can take. This paper has tried to show

how control over work in literature, conceived of in these terms, could be powerfully assisted by the understanding of language which linguistic studies could provide.

The next stage is to go beyond the quick sketches offered here, and develop in detail the suggestions they contain. This is essentially the goal of the second phase of this Programme: it covers at least three things pointed to in this paper. The first is the need to show how detailed linguistic comment could add to the understanding of literature: it is possible to do a great deal in this direction without demanding a linguistic expertise upon the part of the reader that very few teachers are likely to possess. The second is a detailed discussion of certain representative lesson situations which would carry much further than has been possible here the relating of specifically linguistic thinking about language to the problems that they contain. The third is the provision of papers that would make available some of the linguistic thinking about language in relation to society which is at present inaccessible. Certain papers in this first series have already begun to do this. The emphasis will be upon the need to support and strengthen and clarify the best work that is now going on in English: linguistic thinking does have the power to modify current practice in the teaching of literature, but it can do so only through its power to modify a teacher's total grasp of his work in the classroom.

The initiative must rest with the teacher: a rational exploitation of linguistic knowledge about language is dependent upon a correspondingly rational examination of the teacher's habitual assumptions and practices. On these terms, linguistic studies can make a major contribution to the teaching of English, and especially the teaching of literature: but this is not a promise that the teacher can find in linguistics a dramatic resolution of his classroom problems. We must think of a continuing empirical exchange between the linguistic exploration of language and the English teacher's understanding of his task. There is no magic power in linguistics for resolving his difficulties by telling him what to teach: equally, he should not fear that his work in the classroom will be constrained by an alien framework if he makes use of linguistic studies: what he will find in them is a new way of looking at the whole range of his work. They can encourage him to think again about many aspects of it that have come to be taken for granted; and amongst these, his approach to literature is the most important.

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